

NEH PF-255804-17

Sustaining Rare Maps and Books at the University of Minnesota

Lessons Learned

The University of Minnesota Libraries was awarded \$300,000 for the creation of two new rare book vaults in the caverns below the Elmer L. Andersen Library, which is home to the department of Archives and Special Collections, comprising 15 distinct collecting units. This was an important component of a larger project to create new user spaces (the Maxine Houghton Wallin Special Collections Research Center) in addition to collection storage. Key components of the project included:

- Moving the James Ford Bell Library from a vault on the 4th floor of Wilson Library to Andersen Library, including staff, reader space, and collections
- Moving the bulk of the University Library's rare book collection and the Gorman Rare Art Book Collection from the vault on the 4th floor of Wilson Library to Andersen Library
- Creating two new vaults for the storage of rare books and maps in the caverns below Andersen Library, including raising the ceiling, installing new lighting, fire detection and suppression, and security systems, and compact shelving
- Moving nearly 93,000 books and maps
- Renovation of the ground floor of Andersen Library to create a new reading room, new classroom, exhibit space, reception area, and curatorial offices.

Under the parameters of the Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections program, NEH funds were used to purchase compact and stationary shelving for the new vaults, and to provide for fire detection and suppression systems. The new vaults were carved out of existing spaces in the caverns—one had been a workroom for incoming archival collections, and the other had been work areas and storage space for Minitex staff (the University Libraries' resource sharing group), which moved to Wilson Library.

The rationale for moving the collections from Wilson to Andersen was several fold. 1) The University's facilities staff was making adjustments to the HVAC system in the vault on nearly a daily basis to keep the temperature and relative humidity as steady as possible. Wilson is a 60-year-old building that was not designed for the special environmental conditions needed for rare materials. The environment in the Andersen Library caverns, which were designed for rare materials, is ideal for preservation. 2) Shelving in the vault was inadequate not only for the volume of material stored there, but also for the size range of the material. 3) The Bell Library required the presence of two staff at all times to maintain security. This was a significant drain on the department's student employee budget.

Lesson 1—You are not in control

It is undoubtedly a truism that projects such as this one never go quite according to plan. First, the library is not in control of the project. The contractor, architectural firm, and your institution's capital planning office are. Second, schedules will not be met for a variety of reasons. Third, unanticipated building issues will have to be addressed. In our case, it was the presence of water supply pipes for the sprinkler system for the entire cavern that ran over the space planned for one of the rare book vaults. Those pipes were moved to an adjacent hallway to prevent the possibility of a leak.

One thing we didn't anticipate was the University's Risk Management Office suggesting (very strongly) that we install a clean agent fire suppression system in the new vaults. The caverns have a dry-pipe pre-action sprinkler system throughout, but Risk Management's reasoning was that it would be a bad idea to have wet books should the sprinkler system activate. With a clean agent system, the chemical is released first, and then if the fire persists, the sprinklers activate. Although we weren't initially convinced that a clean agent system was needed, or that it was safe, with assurances from the fire marshal, we agreed to the installation. Thank goodness for the project's contingency budget!

Lesson 2—Plan. Then plan some more

When a collection move is involved, there is no such thing as too much planning. The move was perhaps the most important aspect of our project. We were determined that not a single item would go astray. In our case, we were moving three collections, none of which were fully cataloged, and none of which were entirely in call number order on the shelves. It was fortunate that our head of Data Management and Access (cataloging) insisted on a full inventory of the Wilson vault, which began more than six months before the move was to take place. Every item got a barcode slip. Books and maps were cataloged. Gaps in call number order were marked so volumes could be pulled and loaded on trucks in the correct order to make unloading and shelving a more straightforward process. The books were shelved more or less by size in the Wilson vault (each of the three collections had separate shelving areas and this separation was maintained), and the new shelving in Andersen was planned to accommodate the needed linear feet of shelving for octavos, quartos, folios, flats, and oversize, with as much room for growth as possible. The Bell collection has its own unique call number system, and the rare and Gorman collections have both Dewey and LC classifications. No new cataloging is being done in Dewey, so there was no need to leave room for expansion there.

The collections were measured. Several times. We wanted to be absolutely sure we were planning the right amount of shelving for each size of material. No more flats hanging over the edge of the shelves! Portolan charts and oversize maps required stationary shelving with enough aisle space for safe removal. In addition, the Collection Management and Preservation department made wrappers and boxes for at-risk materials, and made new containers for the very large maps. Just over 6200 new enclosures were made.

Rather than hiring a moving company, we decided to move the collections ourselves, given the painstaking care we thought was necessary for such valuable materials. We didn't want to have to rush, or meet a moving company's schedule. Every day from January 8 through March 23, 2018, fifteen large carts were loaded with materials from the Wilson vault by Data Management and Access staff. The barcode of each item was scanned before being placed on the cart. When full, carts were padded as necessary and shrink-wrapped so nothing could topple over or fall out. Every morning a team of people (ranging from Associate University Librarians to work-study students) pushed the 15 carts to the loading dock and onto a Libraries truck. Given that the valuation of the materials on any one cart could range between \$10,000 and \$1,000,000 and that the route to the loading dock was a public space, a plainclothes officer from the University of Minnesota Police Department escorted the carts. After loading, the truck was locked and the police officer accompanied the materials on the short drive to Andersen Library, where the fifteen carts were unloaded and pushed into the vaults in the caverns.

There, a team of staff from the Department of Archives and Special Collections scanned each barcode and placed items on the new shelves. A total of 85 staff, from all parts of the Libraries, participated in one or more aspects of the move, which took 4895 person hours. In all, 92,819 items were transported from Wilson to Andersen, and all were accounted for upon arrival. We haven't calculated the cost in staff time, but in retrospect, we couldn't have successfully accomplished the move any other way.

Lesson 3—Construction project experience cannot be overrated

We were fortunate in having both a Finance and Facilities Director and a Facilities and Operations Director who had experience with construction projects. They knew what to look for, how to decipher the technical jargon of the trades people, and which offices at the University needed to be directly involved or at least kept in the loop. They made sure we got what we wanted when there were options from which to choose.

Conclusion

We learned so much from this project; by the end, we felt like we could take on any renovation project the University chose to send our way. It did take a village, however, with lots of different kinds of expertise brought to the table. A key component in the success of the project was funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.